

Forward Unto Fire

by sirjosh10

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Summary: After years in space, the Spirit of Fire catches the Dawn's distress transmission, the battered colony ship reawakens to a new, old threat. Adheres to main trilogy, offers an alternate to Halo 4. Rated T just in case, Enjoy!

1. Awaken

Quiet. The whole ship was quiet.

The year according to the data log was 2554. Twenty years since the Spirit of Fire had lost contact with any UNSC forces, and the ship was beginning to die. Already aged by the time of its recommission in 2520, the battered vessel now struggled to remain functional. Having lost its main trans-light reactor, the ship now relied only on its thrusters, and even those had died down to a dull strumming whir. The crew was dormant, at least those surviving the last engagements with the Covenant. The only activity still aboard the craft, was a small blue light on the observation deck.

Serina, the ship's AI unit, was booting up once more for system diagnosis, something she'd been carrying out once every few months and she was getting very, very tired of it. By all rights she should be dead, an AI's life span was considerably short, and she'd already outlived herself a few times over, and at great cost. Before the last of the crew had gone to dormancy, several technicians had worked on ways of preserving this most valuable asset, and at the price of purging a great deal of system data, they had been able to fragment and store away the most of the unit. For Serina however, this only delayed rampancy, a condition which awaited all AI that outlived themselves.

It was a hard thought to avoid, and the AI unit attempted to focus on the task at hand. Evaluating the ship's status, deploying a beacon, waking crew for necessary maintenance, but even the simplest tasks now, had become incredibly difficult, and it was annoying.

Systems status: Functional

Reactors: Online

Weapons: Functional

Armor Integrity: 68.2%

Life Support: Online

Crew: 6,512 personnel in Cryo

/

Armament:

/

Armament:

15/22 Deck Guns Operational

Point defense guns operational, ammunition low

5 Tactical warheads in storage

/End of system inventory/

/Maintenance on cryo-chamber 05 required/

The blue glow on the pedestal intensified and from it a female figure emerged. Serina, clad in a white coat stood and touched a finger to her temple as she went through the process of waking some engineers for the necessary repairs, and it was unusually difficult. As in an expression of frustration she tapped her finger harder to her temple and furrowed her brow in the effort, how difficult could it be to send a simple signal?. It was not that she could not transmit the message, but that every time she tried to, it was as if a thousand thoughts flooded her processor.

Eventually, though she did it. Eight cryo pods opened on deck four, and she prepared instructions for the waking mechanics.

Then she noticed something, a faint ping she'd been hearing but for some reason had disregarded. It was a ping from outside, and it was of distress. Serina strained her processor, clasping her head in her hands trying to separate the faint signal from the thousand thoughts racing through her. the blue light in the observation deck intensified, almost to a pure white color, until it stopped. Yes, it was a distress call. After twenty years, the ship had made contact.

Captain, wake up. Something has happened.

2. Change Course

Cryo Chamber

"Captain."

_Cutter stumbles from cryo tube, coughs, and quickly
straightens._

Serina. What is it?

"Listen": _message is played_

A Spartan, in trouble? (_dazed_) How old is the the
transmission?

"Four years, approximately, shall I set course for
interception?"

Yes, immediately. Wait, four years, there have been no other
contacts? "Yes and no, Captain." Odd, where are we, whats our
Status?

I have no record of this space, all crew are accounted for and in
Cryo. Main Reactors are functional, weapons systems on Stand By,
shall I go on?

No, that's enough. "Knew I got all the Important stuff" You said that
signal was four years old, it could have been answered. "possibly,
but the ship's computers would have shut down by now, there's an AI
on board. We can also rule out any attack." Thank you, that will be
all.

"Captain, one more thing" Yes? "We've been lost for over twenty-three
years"

Cutter stops mid-stride

Serina, wake Anders, divert all available power to thrusters and send
out response.

"Yes, Captain, anything specific you'd like me to say? Just tell them
we're coming.

Anders weakly emerges from cryo chamber

****Anders****: Captain, Serina, what is it?

Come with me, Serina, open Observation deck viewing panels. "that
might be difficult considering they were blasted off twenty-three
years ago"

****Anders****:(wide awake) What? Twenty-three years?!

****Cutter**** That's right, we have a lot to talk about.

3. Observations

_Some time later, in Observation deck, some consoles are on, glass is
partially covered by scraps of remaining armor. Anders works on
console while Cutter examines hologram of ship's
systems._

****Anders****: Serena, why aren't you dead, its been over three of your lifetimes.

"Disappointed, Professor?, I had myself in stasis, stored in the ship's databanks, only 'awakened' for proximity alerts, messages and other events of significance."

****Anders****: (_Impressed, but conceals it_) Hmph, I guess you really are a 'Smart' AI, I had my doubts.

****Cutter****: Serena, how long until we get there? "thought you'd never ask, about 192 hours, based on last transmission"

How many aircraft are intact, or at least functional?

"We have four Pelicans, five Longswords and thirty-eight Hornets, no base deploying ships are functional, though two are in repairable condition."

****Anders****: Wake the engineers, we have work to do.

4. Maintenance

(Authors Note: Changed the format here, thanks for any suggestions)

Anders strode up the halls to the bridge, slightly irritated at the sluggishness of the doors. Finally reaching one marked "Bridge". _Curse that power draining Serena, at least Cutter is reasonable_. The door cracks open and stops. _Ugh, could these doors be any slower? __**Oh**_ that's it!

Cutter was standing alone in thought, _How could they go unnoticed for twenty-three years? 2557, is the war over?, Who won? Was the "Forward unto Dawn the last surviving human vessel? Well there's nothing more that can be done now, only give more power to thrusters-_

"Oh That's it!" ****CLANG!**** Professor? "Yes Captain, just some, percussive maintenance! You wanted to see me? Yes, tell me, is there any more power you and the crew can afford to divert to the thrusters? I would ask Serena but she believes we are low enough as it is... professor, is something wrong?"

No Captain, of course not, (_reddening_) I agree with, Serena, on this one, the crew's already made it clear they are frustrated with the doors and automatic laundry, of a number of things.

Very well. Are you making progress on repairs? Yes and no, many of the Scorpion tanks are too damaged to repair but we've had some success converting them to Grizzlies. Thank you Professor, that will be all. One more thing, when we left we had a Slip-space capable Longsword, it's gone. -And so are the Spartans, they insisted that they report to reach as soon as possible, they couldn't afford a long trip home. _It has been a long time_. Do you think the distress beacon could be coming from one of ours? Its a possibility, you're dismissed Professor.

(Anders begins walking out) Oh and would you close the door on your

way out. _But it's broken!_ Yes, Captain.

(AN: Thank you to MoreThanMeetsTheEye231 for "Percussive Maintenance", she writes excellent Transformer fics if you're interested)

5. Forge

Two engineers working in vehicle bay

Ya know, Jenkins, they really ought to change the flavor o' that cryo stuff, its worse than me uncle's haggis back 'ome. Ah, I miss that bulk 'of a man, did I ever tell you abou-

About a hundred times Alain, now hand me that ratchet.

Tsah, There ya go, dont you 'ever take a break?

I've been resting for the past two decades, now if you don't mind, help me adjust the barrel.

Right, you are, ah this is going to be a beauty, the Sergeant would 'o loved to see it.

Well it's not finished so quit your yappin and get to work.

Sheesh, somebody's got their knickers in a twist.

Well, considering the laundry system was taken out, yes.

Anders walks in on Alain's laughing

Whats all the fuss boys? Whoa, what have we here?

Oh this, is a-

'modified Grizzly Tank, 'eve been workin on it for years, ain't she pretty?

Hmm, what did you do, add a third turret?

Haha, eh, no, just filled it with confetti.

-What he meant was an upgrade to the cannon, reloading mechanism, motors, and chassis.

'Shes stronger, faster, and, prettier.

How nice, now I have work to do, as do you-

Don't ya want to know 'what 'we call her?

The sack of potatoes?

The Forge.

(A/N: played with the format, sorry its been so long, as always, suggestions are appreciated)

6. Revision

(A/N: / represents Serina speaking, still toying with format)

Cutter and Serena assessing situation on Bridge

Again, you said we've been traveling over 20 years, without any contact, of any sort?

/Affirmative, Captain, apart from a few stray rocks, we seem to be alone.

Any guess on our location?

/No, this area is uncharted, the nearest reference point was that unknown planet of neither human nor covenant make.

Cutter in thought

/Captain, -

Serena, If we are losing the war-

/Then that Spartan will be needed more than ever.

Have medical bays on standby, and prepare all functional battle stations for combat.

/Expecting trouble?

I've heard that one before.

Anders in lab with Serina

Serina, where are my files on Arcadia? I had some... research to do

/When I preserved myself in the ships databanks, I had to make room for my data, I assure you professor, only irrelevant information was erased.

Then why is there a whole terabyte on the uses of chocolate? How is that relevant?!

/It was deemed necessary.

Anders fuming

/Get back to work shall we?

Yes.

Bring up all data on covenant shield technology, I'd like to integrate it into some of our Cyclops, they will be useful in close combat.

/Using data I, acquired from the Spartans, we should be able to construct some prototype shield generators similar to those on

MJOLNIR armor.

You know about MJOLNIR?

/A little, aye.

That's classified you know

/At least in 2531 it was.

AI you cant live with em.

/I'm sorry?

I hope you don't mind if I replace your chocolate files with this new project?

(A/N: Thank you to "The Diminutive Captain " for getting me back on track)

7. Proximity Alert

(A/N: mild language towards the end)

Cutter on bridge with officers and Serina after hours of travel

"Captain!" It was the navigation officer, "Proximity Scanner is detecting several objects in slip-space!"

What is it, the Covenant? "Scans indicate a large undefined mass, it could be several ships or one large one" The officer paused, "yes Captain, it's Covenant, the UNSC could never achieve tight formations" _At least not when we left_ thought Cutter.

Send out a general order, I want all battle-stations primed and ready to fire now. "Yes Sir" came t he response from Defense, officers scrambled to send out orders, typing as rapidly as they issued orders throughout the ship.

Serina flickers on next to Cutter

"You know, you've already issued that command"

"Twice" said Cutter without a glance to the questioning AI.

"It'd be nice if we had some advanced scanners" continued Serina

"It's enough to know we're not alone"

Even if it is the Damn Covies.

"Sir, they're exiting Slipspace!" came a report from the port side, exclamations followed as officers frantically attacked their keypads.

It was the Covenant.

All battle-stations fire at closest target, Fire MAC when their shields go down. Serina, Begin evasive maneuvers!

"Give em Hell boys!" sounded Serina

8. Equitable Vindication

_Thel 'Vadam, the Arbiter addresses the Shipmaster of the cruiser
__**Equitable Vindication**__ in pursuit of Covenant Loyalists in
Slipspace._

Shipmaster, Bring us out, its time we silence these deceivers

"By your word" came a hoarse response, "Need I remind you they outnumber us, by four at least"

The cowards have fled thus far, and we will show them mercy, and rid them from this world.

"Or die with Honor" came the guttural assent. "Sanghelios will be ours once more"

An officer reports in
>"Masters, the Loyalists have exited, we await your command"

Arbiter addresses entire crew

Well done, now my brothers, **_hear me_**;

This hour, we take back our Honor, In this hour we will restore our Prestige,

and in this hour **we will send the lying wretches to Oblivion!**

ARRRRRR" roared the ShipMaster in assent.

The Arbiter turns to the viewing console as the cruiser exits Slipspace, the screen instantly alights with rocket fire and Plasma bursts.

"By The Rings" came a coarse whisper, the Arbiter clenched his fists.

9. Fire in the Sky

ALL CREWS FIRE AT WILL

Cutters shouts came unheard under the booming of the MAC cannon and the jarring blasts of plasma beating the ship's outer hull, but they were unnecessary- every crew member knew their duties. Cutter struggled to maintain balance, alarms blared loudly as the ship roared and strained from impact. The artificial gravity was destabilizing, equipment and rubble flitted and zig-zagged about the cabin. _We cant keep this fight up much longer_ thought Cutter. The Spirit had only managed to disable one of the four CSS class cruisers, and only with a full salvo of Archer missiles and a

coordinated MAC blast. "MAC is ready to fire Captain" voiced Serina, "targeting nearest cruiser". "No wait" hesitated Cutter -Alarmingly yet another ship was exiting Slipspace, this one a monstrous Assault ship.

"JENKINS, GET YER BLASTED TURRET POINTED TH' OTHER WAY WE NEED TO FOCUS ON 'EM BANSHEES!"

I know it Alain, but we've got to pin these cruisers, the ship can take the banshee fire, not these acursed plas- A blinding light streaks by the missile pod, searing the deck of the Spirit of Fire. "Blast, that was close!" shouted Alain. "Seven o'clock sharp, there's a phantom!" came Jenkins -"Aha, got'ya little buggers now" Alain launches a barrage against the landing party, the Phantom explodes in brilliant light.

"Whooee!" exclaimed Alain, but he was cut off as a MAC round pierced the vacuum, disintegrating several fighters before being absorbed by a cruiser's shield. In response, the cruisers began charging for another barrage. "Ah Sh-" Jenkins was cut off by a sudden tear in the Slipspace, another ship was arriving.

BY THE RINGS, WHAT IS THIS This was not the fight the Arbiter had been expecting. _No matter_, his eyes shifted to a console, "Shipmaster, fire at will, but spare the demon-kind". Kafrek Vree'dam, shipmaster of the Equitable Vindication did not hesitate to relay the orders, and soon the scarred sky was afire with vengeful light. "Shipmaster, contact the demons, this is our fight, they will not strip us of our honor this time." A growl sounded his ascent, within seconds the monitor was alight; it was the demon Captain.

Cutter squinted at the panel, it was nigh impossible to see with the amount of debris strewn about and the discordant rattles and sonorous blasts that shook the Bridge, threatening to rend the entire ship asunder. The ship had hailed them as fast as it had started firing, **_upon it's own ships_**, and Serina was quick to patch them in. Cutter had trouble discerning the figure in the screen, let alone hear him, it was an Elite most likely. "Serina, improve quality, thats an order" Serina materialized "I'm a bit busy at the moment, but sure". The image became clearer, but another MAC blast resounded leaving the Captain with only three parting words "-burn with them" before the screen went blank.

"Arbiter, they heard you not" stated Kafrek. "And it matters not, our actions, not our words speak the nature of our intentions" The Arbiter hesitated, "quickly now, move us between them and oncoming fire". _By your word, Arbiter_ thought Vree'dam.

10. The Skies Alight

Alarms blare incessantly about the ship, plasma bolts berate it's already beaten hull. Missile pods rain salvo after salvo of thunderous blasts upon the enemy, it is met by ceaseless waves of scorching plasma, piercing the outdated colony ship in too many places at once. The entire crew works feverishly to keep up the fight, but they are loosing. Cutter on Bridge.

A bolt of_ plasma sears near the observation deck, the room is

saturated with a resonant tearing noise._

Serena! Get me a status report, is the MAC cannon still operational?!

"Checking... Yes, Captain, but one of our generators has been damaged, It may be at risk of meltdown should we prolong it's use"

We keep this battle up, no matter the cost.

"Aye Aye, Captain" _*flickers off*Crew Member: "_Captain!", "Covenant Cruiser heading for our starboard side!"_What in the hell are they doing?_, thought Cutter

Several more Plasma bolts sear into key sections of the outer hull.

Officer: "Sir, we're loosing structural integrity! Atmosphere is venting at an unsustainable rate!" _grim furrows form on Cutter's face as he clenches his fists tighter. _"Cruiser's preparin' for a broadside!" _One of the bridge officers falls unconscious as the side of the massive ships glowing broadside comes into view, its plasma cannons charging. _

On board the Cruiser Equitable Vindication

_Kafrek Vree'dam: "_Great one, our weapons our charged, we await your orders..."

_Arbiter: _"Then their moment of judgement has come, Fire.

The cruiser's sides glow brilliantly as plasma is concentrated, in an instant the shields are dropped and a massive wave bursts through, surging vigorously through the torn vacuum, incinerating hundreds of small craft before meeting the shields of the loyalists. A dazzling pulse of pure energy is emitted as the plasma sears through first the shields before disintegrating exposed hull, biting viciously into the smaller CRS class cruisers, two of which explode instantly. The light display could have caught the attention of the Forerunners.

The Arbiter watches the panels light up, only in his eyes could one see his satisfaction, he stood motionless.

11. Let them speak

Onboard the Spirit

"Sir, that Covie ship's firing on it's own!"

Cutter immediately turns from his console just at the instant the room is engulfed in the blinding shadow of the Equitable Vindication as Plasma fire meets shield. Like most of the crew, it takes a moment for him to gather his senses, and close his gaping jaw.

_"The Covenant have been known to recklessly kill their own, but never on this scale" _thought an astounded James Cutter.
"Perhaps..."

The Captain could not complete the thought before being blinded by a second blast of light, the ship shuddered once more at the magnitude of the impact.

Officer: "I'm reading three Covie ships now offline, I'll concentrate fire on the big one-"**_"No."_** Cutter interjected, "Hail that cruiser, I need to know what's going on, and put it on speaker, we should all learn of our fate."

The Equitable Vindication

_Comms Officer: _"Great one, the demons wish to confer with us"

_Arbiter: _"then let them speak, and so be enlightened"

"As you say"

Cutters voice is received clearly despite frizzling circuits and alarms in the background, he presents himself, with his crew listening.

"This is Captain James Gregory Cutter of the CFV-88 Spirit of Fire

12. Let them die

Activity aboard the Spirit's bridge lightens as crew members listen intently to the comms.

Arbiter.

"Captain, I have no quarrel with you, what would you ask of the Arbiter?"

Cutter pauses, confounded, the Elite before him appeared the same as one so recently dispatched by Sergeant Forge... The Arbiter...

"It should appear my crew and I are not up to date on information... **what** are you doing?"

The Arbiter's voice is overwhelmed by alarms as yet another plasma bolt rips through the Spirit's hull, it is a direct hit and puts several systems offline.

_Crew members once again scramble, one officer yells
>"Sir! comms are down!, we're venting atmosphere!" gasping in ragged breaths, he continues; "we're loosing structural integrity"

"and life support?" shouted Cutter amid the failing monitors and braying alarms.

"Its functional, but not sustainable for long, our generators are going down!"

"Can we stop it?" implored Cutter fiercely, fear working it's way into his voice

The officer rushes to a monitor, begins typing furiously, but the monitor goes offline as the ship struggles to cope with the damage.

Had anyone stopped to look out a view-port, they may have noticed the Equitable Vindication sustain several large barrages from the loyalists as they moved in to better defend the failing Spirit. None could however as they desperately conducted repairs. Even Serena was too occupied as she worked with Anders to notice the Seperatist flagship take a substantial beating on their behalf.

The Equitable Vindication

"Why, Great One, must we defend these demons, they are weak, let them die" stated Kafrek

"Enough of their blood's been spilt on the Prophets' behalf, no more" replied 'Vadam.

"Now, burn the traitors, and make haste, for we too are mortal"

13. Alone in the dark

The UNSC Frigate Forward Unto Dawn, or what was left of it, lay dormant. The severed stern of the frigate floated and drifted with no points of reference. A few remnants of the Ark and bits of the newest Halo had found their way to this corner of the abyss as well. Not many though, the Master Chief had done well in destroying the instillations- and the Flood.

He had not done it alone.

Of the countless souls, sacrifices, and machines that had played a part in winning the war, very few remained.

One however, was on this ship. Waiting, like so much wreckage destitute of purpose.

Like the so many shreds of metal floating outside, Cortana's mind too wandered aimlessly in abysmal space. It had been so long since, anything, there had been no changes for years. The smart A.I. however, could not sit idle. Her complexity would not permit it. "There must be some input. _No._ Well then, there must be something I can _think_ about."

There was very little the A.I. could do, she pondered everything, rifled through thoughts furiously, assessed the condition of the_ Dawn_ over, and over again.

She stared at Chief. Fighting the urge to wake him, she set her mind to solving issues, doing anything she could think of to fend off rampancy.

It was only a matter of time.

This tortuous cycle carried on endlessly, as the broken ship drifted ever onward into the silent deep.

This monotonous cycle, however was finally broken when a planet came into view.

14. With a flash of light

"SERINA GET US OUT OF HERE!" Boomed Cutter over the wailing alarms and sound of shredding metal. The Spirit had taken several more hits, and had become virtually dead in space- and the battle still raged about them. "Captain, we have sustained too much damage" Serina almost yelled back. "We're not going anywhere"

Having lost video feed and with the blast doors securing the viewing panels- they were flying blind. Proximity sensors were still functional, but with the artificial gravity failing and chaos throughout the ship, few saw the readings. Fewer still could tell what was happening. Serina for one, noticed as the blips indicating Covenant craft, disappeared, one by one. And then it hit them.

The Equitable Vindication, minutes prior:_

"**Arbiter**, they are preparing another salvo. Our shields will not sustain another, your orders?" Kafrek demanded viciously. The former Covenant assault carrier was tough, but susceptible to it's own technology.

"Turn us about, let them hit our side. Do it now" The CAS assault carrier rolled just as the three remaining CCS class cruisers fired. Countless plasma torpedoes smashed against the failing shield- and several made it through.

"SHEILD COLLAPSE" reported an officer, "significant damage on port side- all systems functional... They are charging their energy projectors"

The Arbiter's face set, as he stared at a monitor. "Roll again, and do the same"

"As he said" relayed Kafrek, partially cut off as an alarm blared on. "and silence that alarm."

"ARR" obliged an officer working fervently at a panel.

The Equitable Vindication rolled again, exposing it's unshielded underside.

"Weapons Charged" exclaimed the officer, shall I-"

"Fire."

The beam of energy charged out of the carrier, to meet three more heading for it-

The ensuing burst of energy blinded any who looked upon it, and deafened many more as the shock wave tore through everything within a few hundred thousand kilometers. The loyalists were hit first, being much closer. -Waiting a few extra moments to synchronize, proved to be fatal. As for the Vindication- it could be argued that the Spirit was in better condition.

15. No one will see

Arbiter! Arbiter! Cried Kafrek, in the darkness, "Do you yet live?" He was forced to stop as coughing consumed him. He could neither see nor hear anything at the moment. When the glassing beams collided, the shock wave had wreaked havoc on nearly everyone's internals, needless to say the damage to the ship was far worse. Shipmaster Kafrek Vree'dam fumbled out of his chair, clawing at his face, squinting fiercely. He could not see. It did not matter, for the lights had already been extinguished by the blast. Emergency lights had flickered as well, but the generators failed. Most crew members, even the great Arbiter was in a similar state, though their senses would soon return. It would, however, be too late for some. The life support, as well as nearly every other system in the ship was failing.

The Spirit of Fire

The re-purposed colony ship rolled, still blind and shedding bits of its hull as atmosphere escaped. The engines sputtered and soon went out as the ship desperately tried to right itself. The main reactors had failed, and the backups were going critical. Serina worked furiously to maximize the use of the remaining power. Utilizing what personnel tracers remained intact, she coordinated the lock down as best she could, giving the crew until the last moments before shutting blast doors. She could not save all though, and as many a blast door sealed so did a crew man's life. Within minutes of the blast, she had contained what was left of the atmosphere. It was not much as most outer decks had been breached. Most compartments were now sealed- she would concentrate now on preserving herself with the last of the power. The last generator would stop whirring in seconds now- now it was all up to the crew.

Cutter heaved, struggling to get oxygen, he looked around for a mask, but could not see. His ears were ringing and his vision hazy. Fortunately, the Vindication had shielded the more fragile humans from the would be fatal blast. Nevertheless, it would be some time before his senses fully returned. At the moment, his bleary eyes could scarcely make out the flashlight beams of an emergency response team.

The Captain of the Spirit of Fire faded into unconsciousness just as a mask was pulled onto his face. The last thought to cross his mind probably regarded the safety of his crew- so many of which were now dead or drifting blind into the vast empty.

End
file.